

## University General Education Committee

### Minutes from meeting of November 4, 2022 in James Union Building, Room 100

Voting members present: Keith Gamble (chair), Leon Alligood, Nita Brooks, Janet Colson, Warner Cribb, Sydney Fischer, Mark Frame, Terry Goodin, Yi Gu, Virginia Hemby-Grubb (via Zoom), Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Angela Hooser, Sungyoon Lee, Ann McCullough, Scott McDaniel, Keely O'Brien, and Amy Sayward

Voting members absent: Rebecca Fischer, Rachel Kirk, and Cheyenne Sweeley

Ex-Officio: Susan Myers-Shirk, Stephen Severn

Others present: Christabel Devadoss (via Zoom), Tammy Melton, Kristen West (via Zoom), Elizabeth Wright, Anne Anderson, Betsy Dalton, Christina Cobb, Anna Kate Holt (via Zoom), Deb Perry, Mary Hoffschwelle

Keith Gamble, committee chair, opened the meeting. He asked if there were any edits needed to the minutes from the previous meeting. There being none, the minutes were considered approved.

Warner Cribb asked Gamble to describe the background on the development of the draft assessment plan that was the subject of the committee's discussion. Gamble provided information on the meetings and discussions of the committees and subcommittees that had resulted in the draft assessment plan.

Susan Myers-Shirk, the General Education Director, then provided information on her role and that of the implementation team in developing the draft assessment plan. She distributed copies of the SACSCOC requirements for assessment and stated that good assessment must be measurable, manageable, meaningful, and affordable. She referenced how Clemson University assesses their General Education curriculum [include link]. She stated that she and the implementation team were certainly open to changing the draft assessment plan based on the committee's discussion today.

Mark Frame asked about the method of assessing the current General Education program. Myers-Shirk responded that MTSU currently assesses the competencies previously defined by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), which are measured in ENGL 1010, COMM 2200, and MATH 1710. The responsible departments issue reports to the University General Education Committee (UGEC), which asks them to address the question of continuous improvement. Frame then asked how the California Test of Critical Thinking Skills (hereafter the California test) factors into the current assessment of General Education. Myers-Shirk stated that that data does not clearly connect to the General Education program, since the test is given to graduating seniors. Myers-Shirk and Mary Hoffschwelle, from the Provost's Office, stated that the California test is currently used for quality assurance funding, but the means of testing for that measure could change in 2025.

Frame then discussed how the current draft assessment plan is a measure of the parts of the program, because it is assessing how students address a specific outcome in a specific course—rather than an assessment of the new General Education program. He suggested an assessment at graduation that would be more holistic than the draft assessment and could be a test tied to the outcomes in the rubrics—which could be an assignment, a test, a survey, or another assessment method. He also

thought that such an assessment method might be a better first step into program assessment, given that the current assessment is on such a small scale.

Cribb stated that he had had similar thoughts and was especially concerned about the variability of assessment within the outcomes areas. He wondered how diverse instructors teaching a range of courses without a single assignment (which would impinge on academic freedom) could ensure similar achievement of student learning outcomes. He also wondered about the variability created by students taking General Education courses at various points in their academic career as well as the faculty workload of the proposed assessment plan. Myers-Shirk said that faculty assessment would address many of these concerns, but Cribb thought that college-level discussion of the expectations in these General Education courses would be needed. Frame thought that departmental-level discussion was needed, since departments are developing the course proposals and therefore are responsible for assuring that courses meet the criteria.

Anderson asked about a General Education exit exam, perhaps as part of or at the same time as the administration of the major field exam. Steve Severn followed up by stressing the need for assessing the program when students finish the General Education program, somewhere around the completion of 36-40 credit hours. Gamble stated that program assessment had been an integral part of the discussion of a capstone course or integrative seminar as part of the new General Education model, but that model had not moved forward (much to the sadness of Amy Sayward). Gamble did not believe that students take major field tests seriously and questioned their value for assessing General Education outcomes. Frame also expressed his preference for nested assessment but stated that the General Education Center could still learn valuable things from even end-of-academic program assessment. Virginia Hemby-Grubb proffered her opinion about an end-of-program ePortfolio, which each General Education course contributing an artifact. Myers-Shirk said that an ePortfolio had been suggested by the Design Team early in the redesign process, but it received very little faculty support and had limited support among the student focus groups at the time. She was happy to keep it as an option on the table, however.

Severn, as the ex officio member from Chairs Council, then shared a summary of the views of that group on assessment: (1) Concern about the use of D2L as a portal since not all faculty utilize it (an issue that UGEC has already addressed), (2) Concern about course assessment rather than program-level assessment (the key thing under discussion by UGEC today), and (3) not adding significantly to the workload of faculty teaching General Education courses, who are disproportionately graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), adjuncts, and full-time temporary (FTT) faculty members. He also added that this group was least able to objectively assess their students' work for an external audience given their precarity. He favored something like the Clemson model, which would be more in line with the type of external, compensated, committee-style assessment that the English Department has been doing for years as part of the assessment of the current General Education program.

Myers-Shirk pointed out that the primary rationale for a model in which faculty are assessing assignments in line with the rubrics is to engage faculty, provide a purposeful space for meaningful faculty reflection on course design, and make assessment seem less like an external imposition. Severn countered that feedback should come back to departments, which are responsible for course design, since these are not evaluations of faculty instruction.

Cribb asked about how the random sample would be determined, specifically wondering if there were fewer sections of some General Education courses whether a larger proportion of those students might be sampled than in a course with a lot of sections. He also asked whether faculty members would get feedback in a timely enough manner to influence instruction. Myers-Shirk stated that in the draft assessment plan there was a three-year cycle, and Gamble answered that the sampling technique and the definition of “random” did need a clearer explanation moving forward. He thought that choosing a random selection of students rather than courses might be a better method for assessment. Myers-Shirk reiterated that the purpose of assessment was not to assess individual students or faculty members but rather to assess whether students are meeting the General Education outcomes. She also stated that Lisa Bass (Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Research) and Lisa Green (Department of Mathematics) had agreed to help determine the sampling techniques. Cribb stated that he regretted that UGEC had not started with assessment, rather than learning outcomes and models.

Discussion returned to methods of end-of-program assessment, with Frame pointing out that relatively few students actually take the major field test and California test (30% last academic year), despite their ostensibly being graduation requirements. He pointed out that more seniors took the exit survey than the major field test, and Myers-Shirk stated that the General Education program is thinking about adding questions to that survey as one method of program assessment.

Cribb then asked about whether measurement of student achievement should be done at the college level—for example, the College of Basic and Applied Sciences (CBAS) evaluating student attainment of the inquiry and analysis outcomes. However, Myers-Shirk pointed out that some categories had courses taught by faculty from two or more colleges. Additionally, Beth \_\_\_\_ stated that since we are looking at General Education, whose purpose is to give students a breadth of skills, faculty from any college should be able to assess whether students are meeting those outcomes (with a little bit of training). Myers-Shirk stated that a session at the Association of General & Liberal Studies (AGLS) conference on assessment of science artifacts showed science faculty had a tendency to “grade” rather than “assess” those artifacts. Severn stressed the need to always start such assessment sessions with a norm-setting session.

Discussion then turned to how to do program-level assessment that would assess the new General Education outcomes in a way that is reliable and valid. Frame stated that the California test is a pretty good assessment of critical thinking skills, but other outcomes will also need reliable and valid assessment methods. Gray-Hildenbrand asked about methods of incentivizing student participation in the assessment. Sydney Fisher argued strongly for a means of assessment that was something other than a test, especially when students’ experiences are so saturated with testing. She argued for a clearer connection or even dialog between student assessment and faculty change, perhaps in some type of open forum, which would personalize the process and make it more meaningful to students. Gray-Hildenbrand wondered aloud whether such a student-facing, holistic, indirect method of assessment—perhaps led by a student representative at the True Blue Core Center—might be a good direction forward.

Cribb asked about the nuts and bolts of program-level assessment, and Severn responded by talking about what program assessment might look like if we flagged all students who had completed at least thirty hours: A random set of those students would be selected, that students professors would be notified that they were required to submit an artifact from that student (in paper or via D2L) to the True

Blue Center for assessment. Some of those assignments would likely come from a General Education course with an assignment specifically designed to assess the General Education outcome(s) of that course but other assignments would come from courses within that student's major or minor, which would not fit as neatly into assessment but would show, for example, how the student's writing or critical thinking skills had continued to develop (and transfer to other contexts) since their initial practice with these skills in the General Education curriculum. Some artifacts might not fit with any of the rubrics and would simply be discarded by the assessment team. But the data from such an assessment would be rich, would capture data from a variety of types of learners, and could be examined a lots of ways—it is likely the best type of embedded program assessment that we could develop for new General Education curriculum. Frame stated that this data set could be disaggregated at the back end to assess things like the performance of MTSU General Education students vs. students with a majority of General Education courses at another institution or through dual-enrollment/testing. Cribb pointed out that in this model the students were proxies for assessment of the institution (the SACSCOC assessment target). He followed up by asking if the Center would be able to sift through this data to provide meaningful data to departments on whether their courses were helping students meet their assignment outcomes, and Myers-Shirk asked how the Center could measure continuous improvement (a SACSCOC requirement). Frame stated that a regression analysis for predictive data could help pinpoint problem areas/courses. Gray-Hildenbrand added that this could also be determined indirectly by seeking student input to get directly at the root of data that the Center has concerns about.

The consensus of the committee was for course-embedded, end-of-program assessment and for clearer sampling details; the implementation team was asked to develop a new iteration of the assessment plan along these lines. Frame did suggest, however, that the first iteration of assessment did not have to be perfect and that going from very little program assessment (in the current model) to a very ambitious and all-encompassing assessment model might not be the best first step for the redesigned curriculum. Gamble wrapped up the meeting by thanking the committee for its excellent discussion and reminding everyone that the next scheduled meeting was November 18<sup>th</sup>, when we would continue the discussion of assessment. Myers-Shirk ended by letting UGEC members know that there were travel monies available for those wishing to attend (virtually or in person (the AAC&U conference on General Education pedagogy and assessment in early February. The meeting adjourned at 3:27 p.m.